

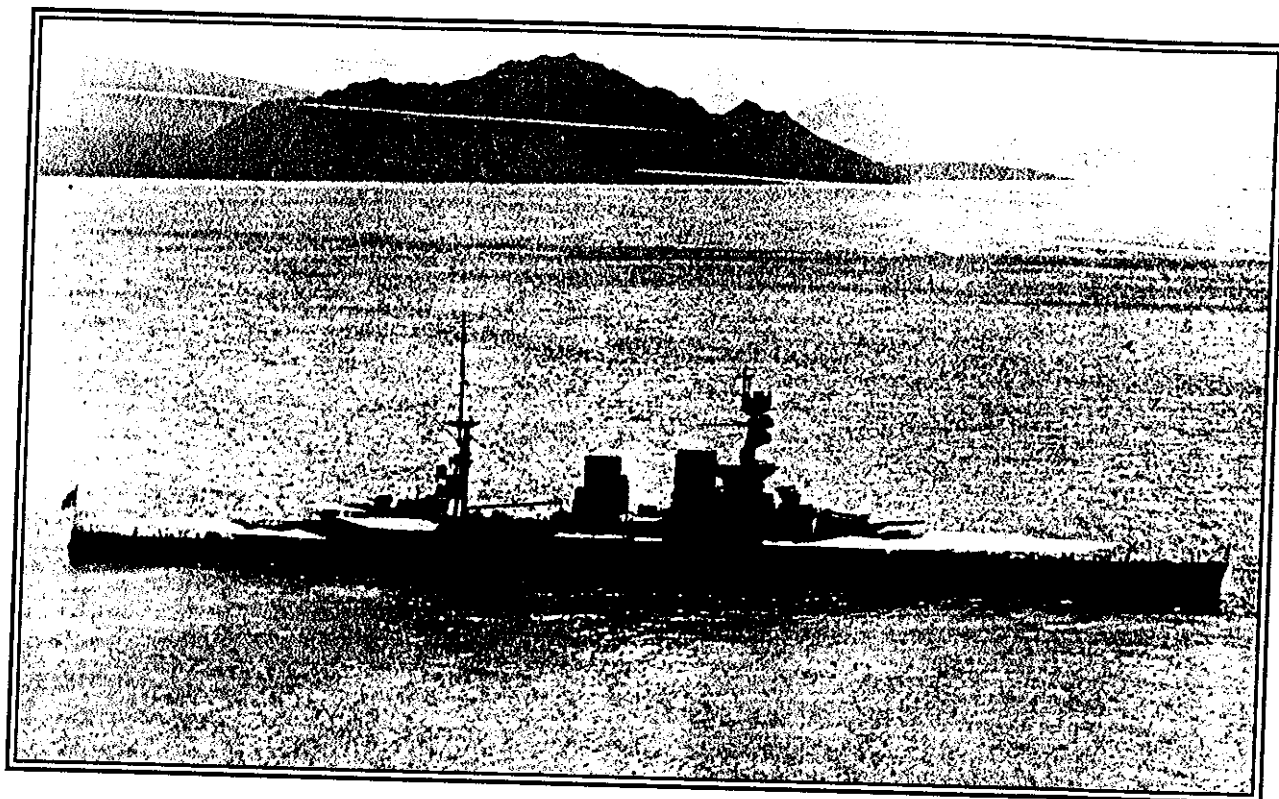
Japanese bombs and torpedoes sank the British battleship Prince of Wales, shown here stationed in Singapore.

Southeast Asia, British admiral Sir Tom Phillips decided to take the huge vessels to sea and try to destroy Japanese ships in the vicinity. But this proved to be a fatal mistake, for the British ships had no planes to provide protection from the Japanese air force.

On December 9, 1941, Japanese planes spotted the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and sank them under a massive barrage of bombs and torpedoes. This shocked the Allies for two reasons. First, the tragedy left most of Southeast Asia defenseless, ensuring that the Japanese would conquer most of the area. Second, the incident called into question the effectiveness of large battleships, which had been the mainstay of the world's navies for decades. The sinking of the two giant vessels marked the first time that aircraft alone had sunk ships so large on the open ocean.

Following the elimination of British naval resistance, the Japanese grew even more confident. The Japanese octopus continued to reach out on the land and in the air, striking at strategic points in Asia and taking island after island in the Pacific.

One key to the entire Japanese offensive was the unusual effectiveness of Japanese fighting men. These troops were highly trained and disciplined. They knew how to survive for extended periods on small rations of rice and could live off the land if necessary. They learned to camouflage themselves to blend in with leaves and underbrush so they could creep unseen through the



Britain's Repulse (above) went to sea with the Prince of Wales to battle Japanese ships. Both ships were unprotected against enemy aircraft fire and sank.

jungle, and they often used animal cries to signal each other. And they were taught to follow the samurai code, choosing to fight to the death rather than surrender. All of these factors made Japanese soldiers extremely fearsome and formidable opponents for American and Allied troops.

The Conquest of the Philippines

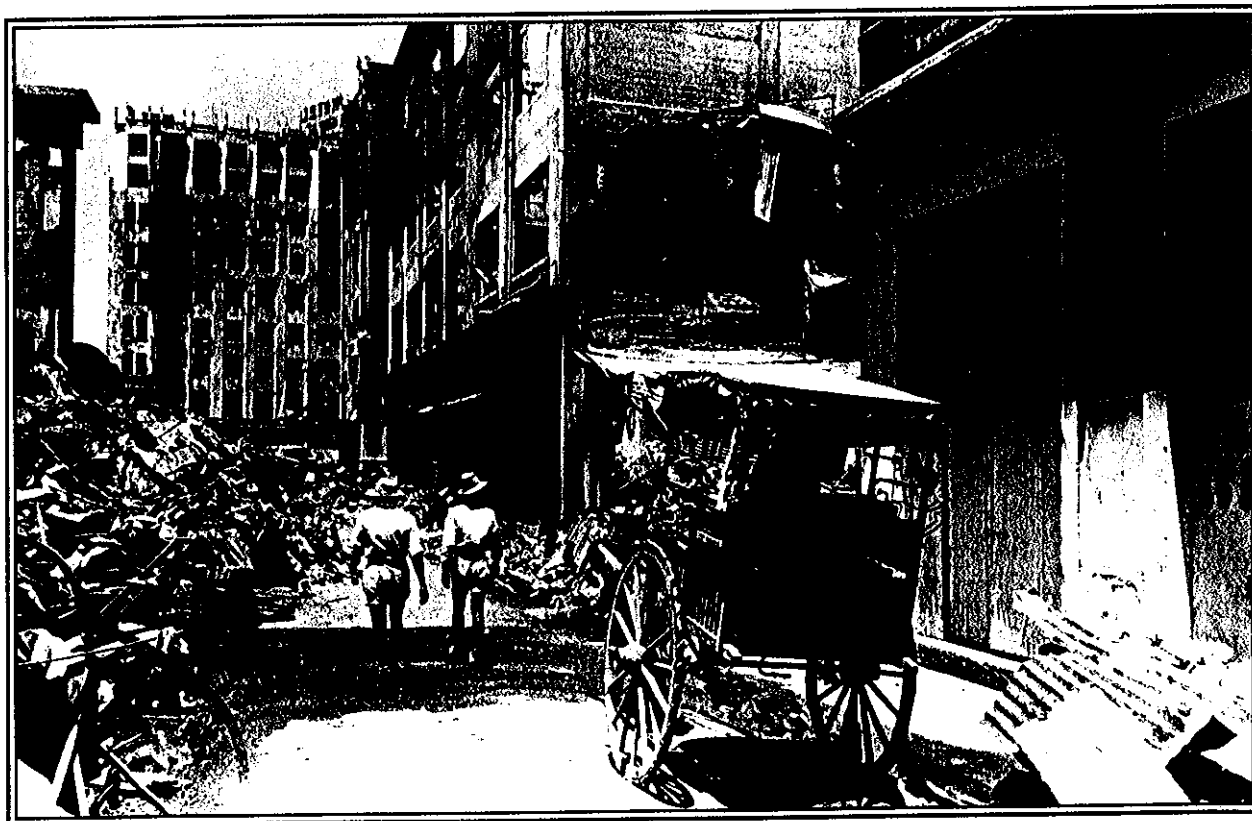
One of the first major tests for the well-trained Japanese ground fighters was in the Philippines. The Japanese leaders knew that capturing the Philippines, a group of some 7,083 islands controlled by the United States, was essential to winning the war. This was because the Philippines extended for 1,150 miles along the strategic military and trade routes between Japan and southern Asia. Conquering the Philippines would practically ensure control of the valuable oil and mineral deposits of the Dutch island of Java and Malaya to the west and of the lands of China and Burma to the north.

On December 8, 1941, the Japanese attacked U.S. planes parked on runways at Clark Field near Manila, the Philippine capital. This and other similar raids destroyed most of the U.S. air power in the area. In the following three weeks, Japanese troops

landed in seven different spots on Luzon, the largest of the Philippine islands, and quickly drove back the unprepared American defenders. The commander of the American-Filipino forces, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, sent a damage report to Washington on December 27: "Enemy penetration in the Philippines resulted from our weakness on the sea and in the air.... Lack of airfields for modern planes prevented defensive [moves]...and lack of pursuit planes permitted unhindered day bombardment. The enemy has had utter freedom of naval and air movement."

As the Japanese closed in on Manila, American troops evacuated the city, and thousands of Filipinos fled into the hills. Japanese planes then bombed the city, touching off massive fires. A few days later, Japanese troops moved in and took control. Immediately, they instituted the code of Bushido, a set of strict rules the Japanese would later impose on all the peoples they conquered. The code warned, "Anyone who inflicts, or attempts to inflict, an injury upon Japanese soldiers, shall be shot to death. If the assailant, or attempted assailant, cannot be found, we will hold ten influential people who are in or about the streets of municipal cities where the event happened." The iron hand of Japanese colonial rule tightened its grip upon the Philippines.

Japanese bombing raids left downtown Manila in ruins. Japanese troops took control of the Philippine capital soon after this photograph was taken.



Gen. Douglas MacArthur

Often referred to as the American Caesar, Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) was one of the most important and talked-about leaders of World War II. He graduated first in his class at West Point in 1903 and was wounded and decorated in 1917 during World War I. Appointed to command the U.S. military in the Philippines in 1935, MacArthur gained world attention during the heroic defense of the islands from 1941 to 1942.

Later, in 1945, MacArthur accepted the surrender of the Japanese and became the supreme commander for the Allied powers in Japan. He oversaw Japan's rapid reconstruction between 1945 and 1951, then went on to lead the American forces in the Korean War.

Although he sometimes proved himself a brilliant strategist, MacArthur was often described by his colleagues as temperamental, ambitious, overly dramatic, and conceited. Believing that his opinions should never be questioned, he regularly argued with his advisers and even his superiors. It was such a disagreement that led President Truman to fire him from his post in Korea in 1951. Always controversial, MacArthur divided the American public into those who hated him because he was power-hungry and self-centered and those who loved him as a larger-than-life national hero.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur was a respected military leader. Before leaving the Philippines, he promised to return to liberate it from the Japanese.





Japanese soldiers celebrate a successful offensive at Bataan. Allied troops later confiscated this photograph from a Japanese soldier.

General MacArthur ordered his troops to retreat to the Bataan peninsula in western Luzon, where he hoped they could hold out against the Japanese until help arrived. The Japanese launched massive attacks on Bataan. Cut off from resupply, the American-Filipino forces ran out of food and had to eat dogs, iguana lizards, monkeys, and snakes as well as berries and roots from the jungle. Their supplies of medicine also ran out, and they suffered from diseases such as dysentery, malaria, and scurvy. Yet as the weeks dragged by, the demoralized Bataan defenders managed to fight on.

The Evacuation of MacArthur

On February 22, 1942, President Roosevelt made a painful decision. He saw that the American situation on Bataan was hopeless and felt it would be a disaster for the United States and Allies if General MacArthur, one of their most brilliant generals, fell into enemy hands. Roosevelt ordered a special group of commandos to evacuate MacArthur and his family in secrecy to Australia. Before leaving, MacArthur told the American general left in charge of U.S. forces, "Defend Bataan ... [as best] as you can." If

The Bataan Death March

When the American-Filipino garrison on Bataan surrendered in April 1942, the Japanese decided to march the seventy-six thousand prisoners to holding camps farther north. The treatment of the prisoners by their captors was one of the most shocking examples of senseless and inhuman brutality in the history of warfare. On April 11, the Japanese tied hundreds of Filipino officers to poles and mercilessly bayoneted them to death. Herded into columns, the Americans and other Filipinos had to march without water under the blazing tropical sun. Japanese guards beat the men with rifle butts as they walked. Those that fell and could not get up were bayoneted. Some had to dig their own graves, and when they were done, guards buried them alive. Guards also taunted the prisoners with food and water but never gave them any. Even men sick with malaria or hobbling on crutches were tortured and brutalized. After six terrible days, the rag-tag column reached the camps. More than twenty-two thousand prisoners died on the march, and thousands more perished from disease and lack of food in the following months.

Thirty Seconds over Tokyo—The Doolittle Raid

On April 18, 1942, the world was electrified with the news that a group of American planes had bombed Tokyo. This was the first significant incident of Allied retaliation against the Japanese in the war, and it filled the American people with pride and hope.

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Col. James "Jimmy" Doolittle, a former stunt flyer, approached his superiors with a seemingly insane plan. He wanted to sneak a squadron of planes through the enemy's massive defense lines and bomb Tokyo. Military planners eventually agreed to the plan, hoping such a bold move would boost the morale of the country. After three months of rigorous, top secret training, sixteen B-25 bombers under Doolittle's command took off from the American carrier *Hornet*. They flew only a few feet above the waves in order to escape detection by enemy radar.

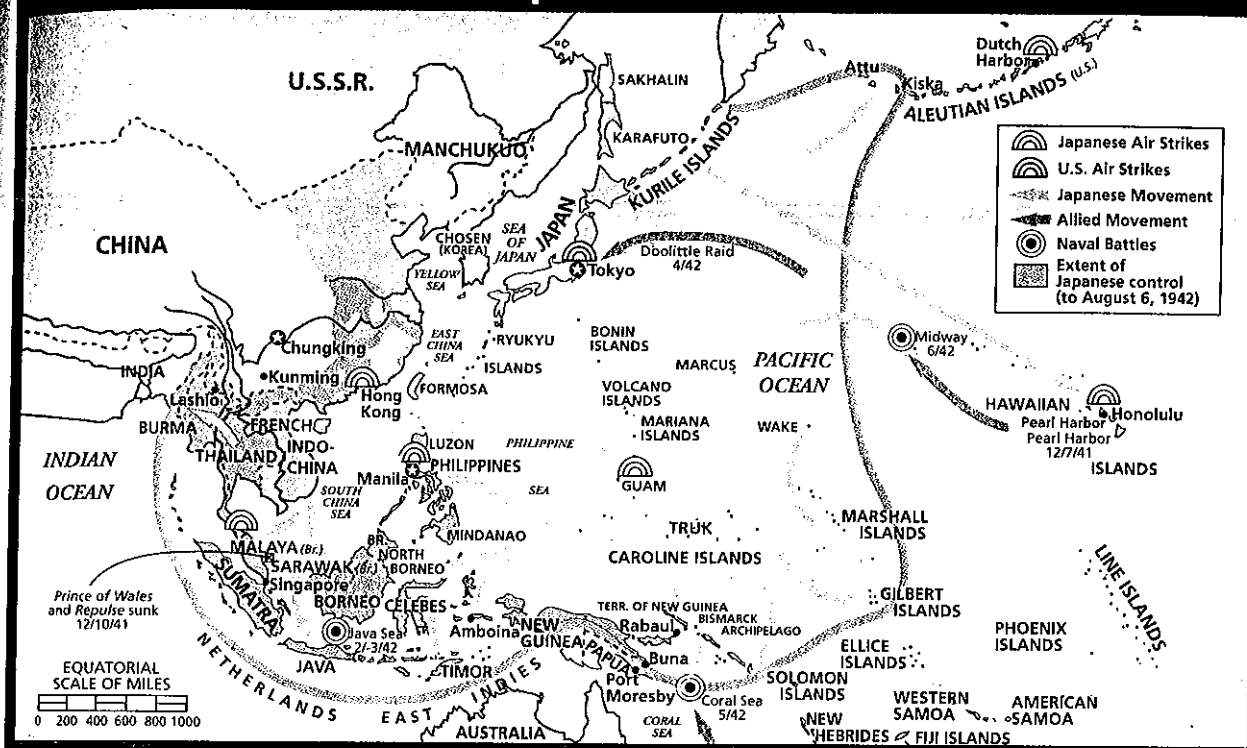
The Japanese in Tokyo were taken totally by surprise and could not mount an effective defense. During the thirty seconds the planes were actually above the city, they struck nearly every one of their planned targets with deadly precision. Plane factories, railroad yards, and a naval base were hit.

Although all the planes escaped, they later encountered a storm and ran out of gas. The crewmen had to bail out. Some were captured, but many made their way on foot to China and beyond. Eventually, seventy-one of the eighty airmen made it home. They had given their country the morale boost it needed and showed the Japanese that their own heartland was vulnerable at any time to American attack.

Col. James Doolittle (center) stands with part of his crew. The men bombed Tokyo five months after the war in the Pacific began.



Initial Japanese Offensives



surrender becomes necessary, he said, "destroy as much [of your own materiel] as you can so that it cannot be used against an American effort to recapture the Philippines."

Indeed, the retaking of the Philippines became a major U.S. goal of the war and became MacArthur's responsibility. When he arrived in Australia, he told the world, "The President... ordered me to break through the Japanese lines... for the purpose... of organizing the American offensive against Japan, a primary purpose of which is the relief of the Philippines." In a stirring ending to the speech, MacArthur vowed to the people of the Philippines, "I shall return!"

On April 9, 1942, thirty-six thousand Americans and several thousand Filipinos on Bataan surrendered. Thousands of others managed to escape to Corregidor, a tiny island off the Luzon coast. The captured soldiers were forced on a bloody death march to prison camps in northern Luzon. The fifteen thousand Americans on Corregidor, heavily bombarded by Japanese artillery and torpedoes, were able to hold out until May 6, when they too were forced to surrender.

The conquest of the Philippines was a major triumph for the Japanese empire. For one thing, the loss of the islands was a massive and humiliating defeat for the Allies. More important, the Japanese now had Manila Harbor, one of the best in the world,



which they could use to supply their bases in Burma and Java. And the newly established Japanese bases in the Philippines could be used to launch attacks against the Allies all over Southeast Asia. Eventually, the Japanese hoped, the Philippines would become the staging area for an invasion of Australia.

Other strategic locales fell to Japan's overwhelming 1942 offensive. On February 27, the Japanese destroyed an entire fleet of American, British, and Dutch ships off the coast of Java and then invaded the island. By March 9, the attackers had taken control of the former Dutch colony, including its capital of Batavia, and had captured ninety-eight thousand Allied prisoners. After many weeks of bloody fighting, Burma, on the Asian mainland, fell to the Japanese in May 1942. Java and Burma were important prizes for Japan because they contained rich supplies of oil, rubber, metal ores, and foodstuffs. But the greatest prize of all would be Australia, the continent in the southern Pacific covering 2,974,581 square miles. Taking Australia, the Japanese believed, would completely demoralize the Allies. And then no one would be able to conquer Japan in the Pacific.

Japan's Zenith

As Japan's naval, air, and land forces ran wild in the Pacific, the United States could do little to check enemy advances. The Americans did engage the Japanese in a naval battle in the Coral Sea, north of Australia, in May 1942, but there were nearly equal losses on both sides. Apart from delaying the Japanese invasion of Australia, the confrontation was largely indecisive. By mid-1942, to the dismay of the Allies, the Japanese empire was at the height of its power.

The only moment of triumph for the United States in the early days of the war came in April 1942 when Col. James Doolittle led a brief raid of B-25 bombers over Tokyo, Japan's capital city and its largest. The move was designed mainly to boost the morale of the American troops and public. From a military standpoint, the raid inflicted relatively minor damage. It was a tiny foretaste of the massive U.S. counterattack to come.

But to the Japanese, the Doolittle attack was a humiliating stain on their country's honor. The Japanese militarists vowed to retaliate by destroying the remainder of the U.S. fleet. Gen. Isoroku Yamamoto engineered a plan to lure the Americans into a trap. If it worked, the U.S. West Coast would be left unguarded. The Japanese reasoned that a weakened and frightened America would then desire peace on any terms Japan dictated. Japanese admirals began to assemble the largest naval operation in Japanese history. Their target was Midway Island at the far western tip of the Hawaiian chain.